



EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECCE): ITS IMPACTS, PROVISIONS AND CHALLENGES- AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) refers to the comprehensive approach to nurturing children's, physical, mental, language, emotional and social development during the critical period from birth to six years age. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a critical input for human development and recognizes the holistic and integrated nature of child development. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is the foundational stage of development which goes beyond the formal schooling. The core objective of early childhood care and education (ECCE) is to foster all round development of children. The constitution of India contains provisions to ensure quality child care and Education. These provisions make way for different policies, programs and other institutional arrangements in this regards. From time to time the government of India has taken different national level initiatives to work on ECCE in well defined framework. Although several effective steps have been taking regarding ECCE, it continues to face various challenges which create obstacles in achieving its aims. However challenges remain including infrastructure, trained teachers, uneven accessibility in rural area, coordination, funding etc. Many children especially from marginalised communities are in disadvantage and are left behind compare to their peers

Key Words: Care, Development, Early Childhood, Education, Policies.

Introduction:

Early childhood is the formative stage of first six years of life and it is the period of most rapid growth and development .Early childhood care and education (ECCE) refers to the comprehensive approach to nurturing children's, physical, mental, language, emotional and social development during the critical period from birth to six years age. According to World Health Organization (WHO) early childhood covers the period from birth to age eight. India has 158.7 million children in the 0-6 year's age group (census 2011) and crating to this important figure of the population to ensure holistic development is important. National Policy for Children (1974) initiated Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) on a pilot basis in 1975 to lay the foundation of holistic and integrated development. The National Education policy (1986) considers Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) as a critical input for human development and recognizes the holistic and integrated nature of child development. This is the consistent with neuroscientific findings that 'over 85% of a child cumulative brain development occurs prior to age of 6 (Government of India 7). India is also a signatory to both the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989 and Education for All (EFA) 1990 , which have emphasised Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE) as the very first goal to be achieved for 'Education for All'. National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) policy, 2013 is with the vision of holistic and integrated of the child, focuses on the care and early learning to support children's all round holistic development. Also under SDG4.2, The target is to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development care, and pre-primary so that they are ready for primary education by 2030.

In the Indian context, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) provision historically remained fragmented, largely supported through welfare scheme such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Anganwadi centres, supplemented by a growing but uneven private pre-school sector (Kaul and Sankar 19). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a concept shift in India's approach to early childhood education. By restructuring the schooling system into a 5+3+3+4 format, the policy formally integrates ECCE into the architecture of education defining the foundational stage. It becomes an important duty for every national government to invest in Early Childhood Care and



Education (ECCE) so that each and every child of a particular nation can embark on the journey of holistic progress and development, thereby creating a just, equal and inclusive society.

Significance of the Study

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is the foundational stage of development which goes beyond the formal schooling. The core objective of early childhood care and education (ECCE) is to foster all round growth and development which encompasses the cognitive, effective, linguistic, socio-emotional as well as physical domain during the period of critical development. Several Developmental theories of famous psychologists have significantly influenced in the formation of ECCE programs for the children's growth and development from an early stage. Scientific studies also confirms that during the early childhood years of child's life is very critical time in the development of the brain which influence the pathways of physical and mental health and behaviour throughout the life cycle. It is also important that deficits during this stage of life have substantive and cumulative adverse impacts on human development. According to UNICEF, Pre-primary education gives children a solid foundation upon which all learning depends on, making every stage of education that follows more efficient and more productive.

The National Education Policy,(NEP) 2020 focuses on the five pillars which are based on Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability. Childhood is that crucial and critical development phrase where a child begins to feel, explore and learn new things and activities that lead to his/her all-round development. It is also significant that during this early childhood period a child develops important life saving skills like language acquisition and social interaction. Children at this particular stage needs high quality care, guidance and support for their long term physical and emotional wellbeing.

Objectives of the study

To study about Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and to foster the child's holistic development.
To know about various policies, programs and provisions of Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE).
To aware about the implementation challenges of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).
To develop pedagogical framework and strategies for Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE).

Methodology: This study employs secondary methods for collecting data and the sources of data includes books, Educational journals, Articles, Research papers, and various websites etc. This study also based on descriptive, historical and experimental method of research.

Review of related Literature

Several Provisions of our constitutions , Policies, Schemes, Reports and organisations have discussed and analysed Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from various perspectives, however yet to apply and consider importance of need of the study. This paper mainly attempts and focuses on impacts of Early Childhood care and Education(ECCE) in different areas of children abilities and on various provisions and also on implementation challenges of Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE).

Discussion

Impact of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in children development:

ECCE has its impact in different areas of children abilities. The scope of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) significantly expanded trough various programmes and schemes through Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). Different programmes related to early childhood care Education impacts in the development of the child's individual growth as well all- round development. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) helps Children in learning and academic success. They have improved literacy and numeracy skills and also help in developing creativity, adaptability and skills essential for social efficiency and build more educated workforce. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is a comprehensive approach which helps the holistic development of a child, the different aspects of the child is being recognised and interconnected with each and every development dimension. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has achieved children's curiosity in learning to explore and discover through child's natural desire. It has emphasised on skill based learning which fosters curiosity through interaction and with play based experiences. The early childhood period from birth to six years as described as the foundation stage of development, needs proper nurturing to be able to develop

the child's abilities. Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE) promotes the important abilities of cooperation, working in teamwork, solving problem and rational judgement and foster emotional intelligent. It helps children to develop social qualities with values and norms at an early stage of its life. Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE) Prepares children in essential skills required in formal learning system. It helps children to learn reading, writing and arithmetic which are important to acquire readiness for school education.

Provisions Concerning ECCE in India: The constitution of India contains provisions to ensure quality child care and Education. These provisions make way for different policies, programs and other institutional arrangements in this regards. From time to time the government of India has taken different National level initiatives to work on ECCE in a well defined framework. Some of such initiatives are-

Article- 45, Directive principles of State policy directs that 'The State shall endeavour to provide ECCE for all until they complete the age of six years. Under the National policy for children (1974), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) was initiated on a pilot basis in (1975) to lay the foundation for holistic and integrated development of children. National Policy on Education (1986) considers ECCE as a critical input for human development and recognizes the holistic and integrated nature of child development. National Nutrition Policy (1993) aims to secure the healthy childhood, free from unmet needs and hunger. Right to Education Act (2009), section 11 states that the appropriate government may make necessary arrangement for providing free pre School Education for children above the age of three years to prepare them for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years. National Nutrition Policy (1993) aims to secure the healthy childhood, free from unmet needs and hunger. National ECCE Policy (2013) put emphasise on early childhood care and education. India Newborn Action Plan (2014) aims to reduce preventable newborn deaths stillbirths in the country with stragic interventions. National Education policy (2020) recommended on integrating ECCE in the formal educational structure. The NEP 2020 is a path breaking initiatives to transform educational landscape of the country. It suggests the inclusion of ECCE in the formal education system by proposing a new 5+3+3+4 structure with an aim to provide education according to age specific needs. This policy also aims to universal access to free, safe and high quality Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE) for all children between age 3-6, by 2030.

Challenges in implementing ECCE

Although several effective steps have been taking regarding ECCE, it continues to face various challenges which create obstacles in achieving its aims. The following are the challenges-

- * Unavailability of trained human resources posses a major challenge to ECCE.
- * Another important challenge regarding ECCE is limited access of resources.
- * Issues with private sector service providers in ECCE suffer from issues of inequitable access, uneven quality, and growing commercialisation.
- * Lack of convergence is another challenge which is an inadequate understanding of the concept of ECCE and its philosophy and importance among all stakeholders.
- * There is no reliable data available about the actual number of children attending ECCE programs.
- * Weak coordination is another challenge of ECCE. Parents specially in rural areas are unaware about ECCE.
- * School Readiness Competencies, Capacity issues, absence of standards are also the significant challenges of ECCE.

Suggestions

- * Integration with primary schools: There should be coordination between primary schools and early education centres, and every primary education centre must set up an early childhood centre.



* Teacher Training: Teachers in early childhood education should be trained and ensure pre-service training to continue professional development.

* Multi-Stakeholders approach: Involving families and the community in the design and implementation of ECCE learning activities.

* Develop Context-Specific, Multilingual Curriculum: Children learn best in their mother tongue during early years. Local communities will be vital in generating curricula that balance early literacy and Numeracy with play based activity.

* Foster Inter-Ministerial and Community Coordination: State level coordination committee between the Ministers and Community based monitoring can enhance accountability of ECCE.

* Enhanced Budget allocation: Enhanced budgetary allocation specially for ECCE can be made.

* Prioritize Equity and Inclusion: For this purpose to serve mostly, targeted programs should organise in remote areas and provide scholarship for disadvantage families.

* Establish Monitoring and Evaluation System: Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE) must be guided by evidence-based policymaking. Independent monitoring system should be introduced to track enrolment, teacher preparation, infrastructure quality, and learning outcomes at the foundational stage.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy of 2020 has represented a distinct concept for ECCE in India by shifting it into a more structured and essential component of the education system. ECCE can build strong foundation during early stage with proper holistic and play based approaches.

However challenges remain including infrastructure, trained teachers, uneven accessibility in rural area, coordination, funding etc. Many children especially from marginalised communities are in disadvantage and are left behind compare to their peers. Therefore, addressing these gaps is crucial to ensure equal education facilities as well as opportunities for all children.

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